

A School-Juvenile Court Liaison Model for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency

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Kurtz, P. D. & Lindsey, E. W. (1986). A school-juvenile court liaison model for the prevention of juvenile delinquency. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 37(1), 9-18.

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Article:

Concern about juvenile delinquency is widespread throughout the United States. Alienated youth, whether they have already been adjudicated as delinquent or whether they are troubled and troublesome children who have not yet been in contact with the courts, pose a challenge for the communities in which they live. The challenge is twofold: to deal effectively with delinquent youth to reduce the likelihood of future offenses and to prevent or minimize the occurrence of delinquent behaviors by youth who have not already committed such acts. This paper describes a project which assisted personnel from school systems and juvenile courts in Georgia to work together to achieve these goals.

School is the primary societal institution which affects the lives of all youth between the ages of six and eighteen, and has thus been viewed by many as playing a key role in delinquency prevention and intervention.¹ "While the main sources of most serious offenses almost certainly lie in the features of the broad society, we feel that schools can aggravate the problem or reduce it . . ."² Wenk, among others, noted that educational policy must change to insure students are prepared for constructive personal and social behavior.³ However, the National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals strongly criticized the schools for failing to recognize their role in either the production or prevention of crime.⁴ Schafer and Polk observed that:

There are fundamental defects within the educational system, especially as it touches the lower income youth, that actively contribute to these negative experience, thereby increasing rather than decreasing the chances that some youth will choose the illegitimate alternative.⁵

Factors such as educational failure, perceived irrelevancy of education, alienation from the school and school misconduct are correlated with delinquency.⁶ Schools are also involved with the problem of delinquency because a significant portion of delinquent and unruly acts occur in and around school facilities.⁷ Furthermore, school related offenses are a major reason for which a substantial proportion of youth are taken to juvenile court. The disposition of students placed on probation by the juvenile court often entails requirements such as regular school attendance and a reduction in disruptive school behavior. Thus, schools are inextricably involved in the problem of the prevention and remediation of delinquent behavior and unruly conduct.

Despite the critical role schools play in the lives of students involved with the court, rarely do schools take significant steps to address the needs of these youngsters. Although there is, need for a "linking mechanism" between schools and courts to facilitate communication, only rarely are such processes or procedures formalized.⁸ Most school-court interactions are characterized by misunderstandings, partial rather than full communication, and the absence of coordinated services. For example, the court may stipulate school attendance as condition of probation, but not notify the school of this stipulation. Schools may fail to notify the juvenile court when students commit criminal acts on campus.

It seems reasonable to conclude that most schools and juvenile courts could be doing significantly more to

collaboratively address the problems of troubled youth. The purpose of this project was to assist a selected group of schools and courts in beginning a process of identifying and implementing ways that the two systems could better work together. The assumption was that each system could gain substantial benefits from such cooperation, and, most importantly, students would benefit from increased communications and coordinated service planning.

Intervention

The project had three overriding goals: a) to develop linkages between schools and courts so that services to youth involved with both systems can be coordinated and early intervention rather than remedial/rehabilitation services can be increased; b) to assist school and court personnel in reaching out to other human service agencies to develop a community-wide system of service coordination for young people; and c) to enable school and court personnel to address youth-related community problems with preventive rather than reactive approaches.

The primary strategy for achieving the goals was the development of teams composed of representatives of juvenile courts and the school systems within their jurisdiction. The juvenile court representative was either an intake officer, probation officer or court service worker (CSW) appointed by the judge.⁹ The school representatives were primarily school social workers (SSW) and in a few cases other key school staff. Teams ranged in size from two to six members.

The primary method for developing the teams was to utilize four workshops over a two year period. In addition, consultation was made available by project staff and other resource persons during and outside the workshops. Initially project staff had some notions about what effective school-court linkages would look like and the kinds of prevention programs schools and courts might initiate. However, it was decided that input from systems interested in participating in the project would be sought prior to finalizing the content and structure of the workshops. Thus, elements of a needs assessment were built into the screening process used to select the schools and courts to be involved with the project.

Screening/Needs Assessment

All nonmetropolitan school (n = 70) and juvenile court (n = 49) systems in northern Georgia were sent a project information packet. Applications were received from 2 schools and 22 court systems. Of these, 15 were joint applications (one each from a school system and a juvenile court in the same county). In order to be considered for participation, both the superintendent of school system and the respective juvenile court judge had to submit applications and later sign letters of commitment. Preliminary screening of the applications was followed by site visits to potential participants. The site visits were used to assess interests of key personnel in the goals of the project and motivation for follow-through on project tasks. These visits were also used gain information about areas of concern in school-court relations from the perspectives of both systems. Despite the fact that almost all school and court staff expressed the need for improvements in the working relationships between the two systems, in most instances those same individuals described the present relationships in positive terms.

The screening process also revealed that there were interagency councils for coordinating services to troubled youth in some counties, but not in others. Even in counties with already existing councils, school and court staff were not always involved or the councils were floundering. During the site visits, key personnel indicated an interest in becoming more actively involved in such organizations.

Finally, school and court staff were asked to identify youth-related problems in their community which could be dealt with using preventive approaches. Superintendents and judges mentioned such diverse concerns as child abuse, alcohol and drug use, lack of structured activities after school hours, and latch-key children.

As a result of this combined screening/needs assessment process, five counties (including six school systems and five juvenile courts) were selected to participate in the project. During site visits, it became apparent that each school-court system was unique and that a single procedure for developing linkages and coordinating

services to students involved with the court would not fit all systems. Similarly, differences in community characteristics and needs would render any single approach to interagency cooperation and prevention ineffective. Thus, it was decided to assist each team to develop objectives and procedures to operationalize project goals within their own communities, rather than imposing a model or structure for all teams to follow.

Pre-Workshop Preparation

To assist the teams in beginning the process of individualizing objectives for their they were asked to complete two assignments prior to attending the first workshop. First, they gathered information from other key personnel within their own system regarding their opinions and concerns related to school-court cooperation and youth - related problems in the community. Team members from the schools talked with superintendents, principals, assistant principals, teachers and counselors. Court staff talked with judges, intake officers, probation officers and after-care workers. In addition to giving the team members information about the systems' needs as perceived by a broad range of personnel, this assignment also engaged key staff in the project other than the designated team members. The hope was that these persons would be more likely to later support a plan into which they had given input.

The second assignment required team members to meet together prior to the first workshop to consider the input they had received from personnel within their own systems and to set team goals. Thus, the team-building aspect of the project was begun prior to the workshop. Each team arrived at the workshop with a common consensus about needs and goals to be addressed.

Workshop and Consultation

The primary methods of intervention were a series of four workshops and consultation provided by mail, telephone and site visits. The first workshop was designed to focus on issues which school and court staff raised during site visits. Large blocks of time were devoted to three primary areas: a) improvement of school-court relations; b) development and maintenance of interagency councils; and c) design and implementation of primary prevention programs. In each area, expert resource persons shared their knowledge and experience with the group. After these formal presentations, teams met separately to set goals and plan strategies relative to each area. Their proposed goals for each of the three areas can be found in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

The second workshop, held three months later, served as a follow-up to the first. No substantive new issues were introduced; rather, participants focused on reporting progress on their goals and refining future plans. A full day was spent assisting teams to develop their prevention plans. Resource persons with expertise in the areas of each team's prevention plan (i.e., substance abuse, recreation, law-related education) Worked with the teams.

Intervention during the first half of the second year of the project involved providing on-going consultation to teams and conducting an additional workshop. A newsletter which included articles relevant to project activities was published to keep participants informed about the progress of other teams. The third workshop was held six months after the second workshop. It focused on further refinement of each team's primary prevention project. New ideas on primary prevention were presented, problems were addressed and consultation from resource persons was provided. Time was also devoted to case conferencing, team building, group leadership and conflict resolution. At the end of the second project year, a fourth workshop was held. This final workshop taught participants how to maintain their teams once the grant funding terminated and use the Awn as a vehicle to identify and plan for additional needs of troubled youth in their communities. It is hoped that after the second year of the project some team members will be able to offer technical assistance to neighboring school systems and juvenile courts which might be interested in developing stronger and more collaborative linkages.

TABLE 1
SCHOOL-COURT RELATIONS PLANS

Teams	Goals	Accomplishments
Columbia County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop policy for court sharing information with school when court detains youth during school days. 2. Develop written guidelines outlining roles of school and court personnel and procedures for referral. 3. Develop procedures for early referral of truancy cases to SSW. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The court intake officer notifies school when a youth has been detained during school days. 2. A meeting was held by the team between school and court staff during which referral policies and procedures were agreed upon. A concise set guidelines were written up. 3. In most but not all cases of truancy, principals are following the new early intervention referral procedure.
Dalton/Whitfield County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop policies and procedures for information-sharing, court referral, and other forms of cooperation. 2. Conduct regular case conferences. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A 30-page policies and procedures manual was developed by the team, sanctioned by the superintendents and the juvenile court judge, and introduced at a joint meeting of juvenile court and school staff. 2. Team meets twice a month to coordinate service plans for youth involved with both systems.
Gainesville/Hall County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop consistent procedures for schools to follow when referring students to court for truancy. 2. Increase flow of communication to school about students who are involved with the juvenile court. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A centralized referral system was adopted. A system-wide referral form is used and the SSW is liaison for all court referrals. 2. CSW notifies principals when their students are involved with the court. This information is only to be used in the best interests of the student.
McDuffie County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refer students who commit criminal acts on campus to the juvenile court. 2. Refer students who are seen as potential truants or delinquents to the CSW for counseling. 3. Designate a school person for CSW to contact when students are involved with the courts of Youth Detention Center (YDC) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The school refers students who commit criminal acts on campus to the juvenile court. 2. School refers potential truants and delinquents, but no petition is filed and a formal case is not opened. The CSW counsels with these students and their families. Thus far, no one seen through this process has been formally referred to juvenile court. 3. Each school has designated a liaison person who receives information concerning legal, academic, and social information status of youth involved with court YDC.
Walker County	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance school administrators and teachers understanding of treatment philosophies and role of SSWs and the juvenile court. 2. Regularly discuss cases, share information, and solve problems. 3. Initiate use of informal adjustment process in selected truancy cases. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A member of the Governor's Council on JJ and DP gave a presentation to school administrators on the philosophy of school social work and delinquency prevention. 2. The team has met intermittently, but not on a regular basis. In April 1985 it made the commitment to meet once a month beginning with the new school year. 3. This objective has not been achieved as juvenile judge prefers to handle truancy cases himself.

TABLE 2
INTERAGENCY COOPERATION PLANS

Teams	Goals	Accomplishments
Columbia	Revive inactive interagency council and expand its function to include case coordination.	The SSW joined the Columbia County Interagency Council and served on a task force to develop a subcommittee which will staff cases.
Dalton/ Whitfield	Revive the ailing Troubled Children's Committee (TCC).	Team was instrumental in the TCC incorporating new procedures. One team member is chairperson of the TCC and several other team members chair subcommittees.
Gainesville/ Hall	Join the present TCC.	Since the schools and court are represented by other staff at TCC meetings, team members have not joined.
McDuffie County	Start an interagency council to conduct case conferences and plan services for youth.	An interagency council composed of nine agencies began meeting regularly in January 1985. The president and vice-president are members of the team.
Walker County	Support the development of an interagency council to coordinate cases of troubled youth.	Three team members were instrumental in starting 2 councils: Project RESHAPE (State Department of Education) and CASSP (Child and Adolescent Support Services Program) of the Division of Mental Health/Mental Retardation. The team has active representatives on both councils.

TABLE 3
PREVENTION PLANS

Teams	Goals	Accomplishments
Columbia County	Work with Recreation Dept. to develop supervised activities for children in Winfield area; actively involve youth in program planning.	Based on a preference survey of youth in the target area, a karate class was started. Team helped secure half-time JTPA employee for Recreation Dept.
Dalton/ Whitfield County	Develop a program to strengthen bonding between middle school students and the school, and a program to work with delinquent students in school.	The team wrote 2 grant applications for: 1) an in-school probation officer program; and 2) a school climate program. Both grants were approved.
Gainesville/ Hall County	Develop a program to aid high-risk students in the transition from middle to high school. Increase cooperation of school and court in working with students at high risk for future court involvement.	The SSW developed a Peer Pals program to begin in the fall of 1985. Juniors and seniors are recruited and trained to serve as peer pals for high-risk freshmen. High school students who are placed on out-of-school suspension serve half of this time in the in-school suspension program and the other half in community service work under the supervision of the SSW or CSW. The SSW and a juvenile court worker co-lead a group of students with school behavior problems.
McDuffie County	Introduce the RAMP program (an empirically tested substance abuse education program) into school curriculum.	The school plans to train teachers to begin using the RAMP material. Partial financial support for the program has been offered by various civic organizations PTO. The ultimate goal is to train all teachers K-12 and fully integrate it into the school curriculum.
Walker County	Incorporate a law-related education (LRE) program into the school curriculum. 2. Heighten awareness among general public about pertinent legal issues and court procedures.	Three SSW members worked 6 weeks with 3 5th grade classes to pilot test TIPS (an empirically validated LRE program). Team will conduct a LRE workshop open to all teachers. LRE material may be incorporated into the curriculum when it is revised. 2. The CSW plans to begin writing a "Legal Column" for the local newspaper to cover such issues as school attendance laws, law-related education, and philosophy of the juvenile court.

Results

The project was designed to enable each team to tailor its activities to the needs of their individual systems. Although the goals of the project guided teams in focusing on improving school-court relations, working with a

variety of other human service professionals, and developing preventive approaches to working with young people, how these goals were to be operationalized in each area was left to the discretion of the teams. Thus, the most accurate evaluation of the project involves examination of the extent to which specific team objectives have been met and their plans for continuing to work toward goals during the coming year.

In the area of facilitating school-court communication and collaboration, most of the teams had specified goals related to clarifying or modifying criteria and procedures for school referrals to juvenile court, information-sharing, and / or formalizing a system of communication between the two institutions (see Table 1). Most team members were able to meet with superintendents and judges to gain their sanction for the kinds of changes they hoped to implement. In these cases, formal communication systems have been established with either the SSW or other appropriate school staff member designated as the contact person for the juvenile court. A system for contacting the schools when students will be absent due to involvement with the juvenile court has been established in four counties.

The Dalton-Whitfield County team worked throughout the summer to develop proposed guidelines to facilitate school-court cooperation. They prepared a manual which includes sections on the legal philosophy of the juvenile court, description of treatment programs available through the court, juvenile court jurisdiction and procedures, guidelines for referral by the schools, and a description of how school and court staff will cooperate.¹⁰ This material was reviewed and approved by the two superintendents and the juvenile court judge and presented for implementation in a joint meeting of 80 key school and court staff. In McDuffie County, the court services worker met with key school administrators to discuss the role and jurisdiction of the juvenile court and explain a new referral process and form which had been developed by the team and sanctioned by the superintendent and judge. Similar meetings between court staff and school administrators were also held in Columbia and Hall Counties. Thus, most teams made substantial progress on the goals related to school-court cooperation.

Another goal of the project was to assist school and court personnel to mobilize or become party of already-existing local interagency groups concerned with the needs of youth (see Table 2). In four of the five counties Troubled Children's Councils (TCC) already existed, although only the Dalton/ Whitfield team had members who had been involved with the TCC. Hall County had an active council. Neither of the team members attended; however, other persons on the school and court staffs were regular participants. In Columbia County a previously existing interagency planning council was being resurrected. In Walker County there was an inactive interagency group. Neither the CSW nor the SSWs participated. Only in McDuffie County was there no interagency council.

In Whitfield County, team members were instrumental in helping to revitalize their Troubled Children's Council. They arranged for two consultants who had given a presentation on interagency councils during the first project workshop to give a similar presentation for the TCC. One of the team members, the SSW for Dalton City Schools, was elected vice-president of the TCC. In Columbia County, the SSW joined the existing interagency group and assisted in the development of a Human Services Team to staff cases. In McDuffie County, where no interagency council had existed, the CSW took responsibility for organizing an interagency council. Subsequently, she was elected president, and another team member, an assistant principal of the high school, was elected vice-. president. In Walker County, three team members played significant roles in the initiation of two councils: Project RESHAPE, which is sponsored by the State Department of Education and CASSP (Child and Adolescent Support Services Program), which is sponsored by the State Mental Health Division. The school system and juvenile court in Hall County continued to be represented at their TCC meetings by personnel who are not members of the school-court team. In summary, each team made significant strides in assuming an active role in a local interagency council.

The third area of emphasis was the development of primary prevention programs (see Table 3). This area was conceptually difficult for team members, few of whom had previously been exposed to concepts of primary prevention. Thus far, the Walker County team has trained several teachers to teach empirically validated law-

related education (LRE) classes to 5th graders.¹¹ The three SSW team members co-taught the program with the teachers. They have scheduled a workshop to train other teachers in the use of the LRE curriculum. McDuffie County began planning to train teachers in an empirically validated substance abuse education program to be started during the 1985-86 school year.¹² Hall County a Peer-Pals Program was developed at Gainesville City High School to help high risk students with the transition from middle to high school. In addition, a special program has been started to keep out-of-school suspended students off the street and enable them to make up the school they miss for credit. In Columbia County, as a first step toward expanding recreational activities, a survey of youth in the targeted area indicated an interest in a karate class which was subsequently conducted in a church. In addition, the team secured a half-time Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA) employee for the county recreation department. The intent is for this person to provide organized recreation activities for children in areas of the county without accessible recreation facilities. The team is working with the county recreation department to develop additional program but is stymied by lack of available land and money. The Dalton-Whitfield county team chose to develop school climate programs in two middle schools and an in-school probation officer program. The team wrote grants to support both programs. The grants were approved by the Georgia Governor's Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

It is expected that achievement of the team plans in all three areas will result in; the primary and secondary prevention of youth-related problems in general and reduction in student penetration into the juvenile justice system in particular. If schools and courts develop more cooperative relationships, staff in both systems can work together to develop intervention plan and provide services for students. If interagency groups can focus energies on early intervention and preventive approaches to Problems of youth, individual students as well as the community-at-large will benefit. The accomplishment of the teams' prevention plans will result in such diverse outcomes as recreation programs with youth involved in the planning, increased knowledge and understanding of the law and legal process, prevention of substance abuse, and smoother transition for students from middle to high school.

Conclusion

Looking back over the first twenty months of the project, several factors stand out as having contributed to its success thus far. An overriding goal of this project was organizational change. Literature on implementing effective organizational change has documented that sanction from the top of the organization and input from all levels is necessary if effective changes are to be implemented.¹³ From the outset superintendents and juvenile court judges were informed of and endorsed the project. As part of the needs assessment process, team members secured input from key personnel in each school system and juvenile court. By summarizing and reporting these results, team members became aware of concerns and issues outside their own and incorporated these into the plans they developed.

Another important factor which has led to success was the decision to assist teams in tailoring their goals and objectives to the needs of their respective communities. Often innovative models are foisted in their entirety upon systems which are dissimilar from the systems on which the models were originally validated. With no room for individualizing program plans to the uniqueness of the new systems, such programs often fail or are less successful than at the original site. This project not only encouraged teams to individualize plans; it also provided a time and a structure for doing so. The workshop agendas included several hours of working sessions so that when participants returned home they already established most of their goals and objectives, assigned tasks and set deadlines.

The opportunity to be part of a team seems to have made an important difference to the school and court staff. Often these professionals have felt isolated and powerless in their attempts to deal with troubled children. The intervention process, especially the workshops, enabled each team to air common feelings and concerns, build cohesion and become empowered to act. Acting separately, it is doubtful if either system could have effected the changes which have been accomplished thus far. Together, the school and court staff, with the support of their superintendents and judges, have made great strides in finding ways to work together more effectively to help children.

A final factor is emerging. Many positive changes have been made and additional efforts are planned for the future. To ensure continuation of what has been accomplished so far and to insure that future goals will be met, especially in the area of prevention, follow-up consultation and support are required. It is all too easy for school and court staff to become so caught up in day-to-day work responsibilities that commitment to team efforts diminishes over time. Occasional "shots in the arm," provided by workshops or consultations are needed to help them refocus and recommit themselves. After early successes some teams may feel they've resolved all school-court relationship issues and that no attention is needed in this area in the future. However, as new cases arise, new personnel enter each system and laws or regulations are changed, new issues will arise and old issues will re-emerge for consideration. Follow-up training and consultation must not only help the teams deal with these new issues, but must continue to facilitate their working as cohesive teams. One team member stated that he felt the most important project outcome for the schools and court in his area was not the specific agreements they produced, but learning a process for interacting so that future issues could be dealt with in a positive and cooperative fashion.

This participant's comment strikes at the heart of any time-limited project and will be the ultimate test of the project's success. The accomplishments of teams thus far gives an indication of concrete changes which have occurred to help children involved or at risk for being involved with the juvenile court. The true measure of the project's success will be if schools and courts in these five Georgia counties continue to exert themselves cooperatively on behalf of children. While the project activities have been structured to maximize the likelihood of this outcome, the eventual results are up to the personnel in both the schools and the juvenile courts, the individuals who must work together if project goals of prevention are to remain a reality. As a postscript, it is encouraging to note that since the formal termination of the project, several teams have undertaken new initiatives. For instance, the Gainesville/-Hall County team intends to implement a LRE program in the schools. In McDuffie County the team is tackling the problems of latch-key children and truancy.

Notes

- 1 Grant Johnson, Tom Bird, Judith W. Little, *Delinquency Prevention: Theories and Strategies* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1979).
- 2 *Violence in Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Educational Development and Research, Inc., 1976).
- 3 Ernst A. Wenk, "Schools and Delinquency Prevention," *Crime and Delinquency Literature*, 6(1976), pp. 236-258.
- 4 National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, *Community Crime Prevention* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Justice, 1973).
- 5 W.E. Schaefer and K. Polk, "Delinquency in Schools," in *The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, Task Force Report: Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967).
- 6 John C. Phillips and Delos H. Kelly, "School Failure and Delinquency," *Criminology*, 17 (August 1979), pp. 194-207.
- 7 *Violence in the Schools*.
- 8 National School Resource Network, "School Court Liaison Program: The Cambridge Model" (Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1980). Richard E. Isralowitz, "Juvenile Violence in the School: An Examination of the Problem," *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, Nov. (1982), pp. 31-36; Yona Cohn, "Delinquency Prevention—A Systems Approach," *Juvenile Justice*, Aug. (1977), pp. 15-24; *Juvenile Justice Handbook for Missouri Schools*, (Jefferson City, Missouri, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1981).
- 9 Juvenile Court Workers have a range of job titles. In this paper Court Service Worker (CSW) is used as a generic title to refer to them.
- 10 Whitfield County Georgia: *School-Juvenile Court Procedures* (Dalton, Ga.: Dalton Schools, Whitfield Schools and Whitfield Juvenile Court, 1985).
- 11 *Teaching Individuals Protective Strategies! Teaching Individuals Positive Solutions*. Joint Dissemination Review Report to the National Diffusion Network, Evaluation Research Center, University of Virginia, May 1980. A copy of this report or additional information is available from the TIPS Program, Jefferson Annex, 4th

St., N.W. Charlottesville, VA 22901.

12 Replication of an Alcohol Model Program. .This program is based on two NIAAA-selected model programs: "Here's Looking at You, Two, an alcohol and drug abuse prevention program an "CASPAR," an alcohol education program. Additional information about these programs can be found in Prevention Plus: Involving Schools, Parents, and the Community in Alcohol and Drug Education. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Washington, D.C., 1983).

13 Larry Greiner, "Patterns of Organization' Change," Harvard Business Review, 45 (May-June 1967), pp. 119-128.